

Retailers say bus service is too good

Shoppers go elsewhere

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CUSTOMERS are deserting their usual shopping haunt in droves – all because their new bus service is too reliable.

That is the charge facing Ensign buses, which took over the 81 route between Woodlands Avenue and Brentwood six months ago.

Shoppers themselves have backed up the suspicions from several shop owners, including those at the post office, the florist and the carpet shop.

Travel

Residents say that because they no longer have to wait for late buses, which sometimes did not arrive at all in the past, they are now choosing to travel into Brentwood and Shenfield where the prices of goods can be cheaper.

The service – which runs every 20 minutes in the morning and evening and 30 minutes throughout the rest of the day – has seen a 30 per cent increase in



LOSSES: Jacki Higgs and Mandy Adams of Jacki's Florist and Darren Bridge of Hayley's Carpets

passenger numbers since it started operating on May 4 this year.

One 77-year-old shopper who has lived in the area for 51 years said: "I am sympathetic to the shopkeepers but what do you do? It's a free market.

"If you can get a pint of milk cheaper elsewhere and get there more easily, then why not.

"There are people on the bus who before shopped in Woodlands Avenue rather than wait for a bus that might never turn up."

Iris Danaher, 78, who was get-



LOSING OUT: Retailers in Woodlands Avenue claim they have fewer shoppers due to the good bus service

ting off the bus when the Gazette visited the Hutton parade, said: "The bus service is wonderful – I go to Brentwood because I can save quite a bit of money."

Darren Bridge, who has recently had to make a member of staff redundant from the Harley Carpets business he owns in Woodlands Avenue, said: "There has definitely been fewer people shopping here since the new bus service started. My trade has virtually disappeared."

Quieter

Jacki Higgs, owner of Jacki's Florist in the parade, added: "It has been quieter since the new buses started operating."

Sub postmaster Mike Wenborn said the drop in the number of people using Woodlands Avenue post office was down to the change of route.

"Whereas before there were two bus routes – clockwise and anticlockwise – there is now only one, which means anyone taking the bus to the post office now has



SAVING MONEY: Iris Danaher coming off the number 81 bus at Woodlands Avenue

to go all the way round, rather than taking a five-minute journey one way and then a five-minute journey the other," he said.

Debbie Howe, manager of Woodland Bakery, said she had not seen any change.

But Matthew Norton, manager of the newly refurbished Co-op, which reopened less than a month

ago, said: "If anything we've seen an increase in trade. We are taking trade off Shenfield."

Paul Dickson, Ensign's customer services manager who took over the route from First Buses, said: "We are obviously delighted we are providing such a well-regarded service, but I'm shocked it may be taking away business."

In brief

Safety concerns over notorious junction

DODDINGHURST: A parish is going straight to the top to demand answers over safety improvements dogged by delays.

Members of Doddinghurst Parish Council will write to the county transport chief, Cllr Norman Hume, over long-running delays to work at the notorious Swallows Cross junction and a lack of repairs in general to the parish highways.

They will also send a copy to the highways panel chairman Cllr Jean McGinley and may even put in a Freedom of Information request over the fiasco, if no progress is made.

Vintage trip to shops

BRENTWOOD: Vintage buses from the 1930s and 1940s will take people to and from Lakeside and Bluewater for a spot of Christmas shopping.

Ensign buses will be running two routes to the shopping centres on December 4, including the X81 which operates between Shenfield and Brentwood.

Ensign's customer services manager Paul Dickson said: "The last such event on August 28 was extremely successful."

Passengers will be able to hop on and off the old buses along the X81 route on the day.

Whodunnit show fun

BRENTWOOD: A murder mystery evening hosted by the Brentwood and Ongar Conservative Association will take place later this month. The event, being held in St.

Margaret's Hall in Doddinghurst, will feature an evening of entertainment as well as a hot dinner during the show.

■ Doors open at 7pm for a 7.30 start. Tickets cost £10. Call 01277 822968 or 01277 822902.